

TRIP REPORT:  
**IRAQ & LEBANON**  
SEPTEMBER 2011



A delegation from the House Democracy Partnership (HDP) traveled to Northern Africa and the Middle East from September 24 to October 3, 2011, to inaugurate its partnership with the Iraqi Council of Representatives, continue its partnership with the Lebanese National Assembly, and examine the political changes underway in Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan. The delegation was led by HDP Chairman David Dreier (R-CA) and included HDP Ranking Democratic Member David Price (D-NC), HDP Members Keith Ellison (D-MN) and Gwen Moore (D-WI), and Representative Jim McDermott (D-WA). This was the third HDP outbound congressional delegation of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress and the Partnership's 24<sup>th</sup> overall since its inception in 2005.

The delegation began its mission in Tunisia (September 25-26), where it met with leaders from the interim government, civil society, and political parties to discuss Tunisia's democratic transition in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution in January 2011 and the departure of former President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali. The delegation met with acting Prime Minister Caid Essebsi and Dr. Yadh Ben Achour, the President of the Supreme High Commission on Defending the Goals of the Revolution, to discuss the constituent assembly that is to write a new Tunisian constitution. The delegation also met with leaders from four prominent Tunisian political parties to discuss the upcoming constituent assembly elections and the political platforms on which they are basing their campaigns. Finally, the delegation met with other party representatives, women's rights activists, business leaders, and members of the diplomatic corps at two events hosted by the U.S. Embassy.



*Delegation meets with Dr. Yadh Ben Achour of the Supreme High Commission in Tunisia*

Next, the delegation visited Cairo (September 27-28) to discuss the political changes that have taken place since the fall of the Mubarak regime with civil society, interim government, and military leaders. Among others, the delegation met with Prime Minister Essam Sharaf and Deputy Foreign Minister Wafaa Bassim to discuss the road ahead for Egypt's democracy and the other challenges facing the country, including the struggling economy. The delegation also met with Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the chairman of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which is running the country until a permanent government can be elected. While the delegation commended the Egyptian military for its role in facilitating Egyptian democracy, it also expressed concern about a range of issues including the use of military tribunals to try civilian protestors, the extension of the Mubarak-era emergency law, and the need for the parliamentary elections to be conducted in a transparent manner that would be accepted by the Egyptian people.



*Egyptian Prime Minister Essam Sharaf and members of his Cabinet meet with the delegation in Cairo*

In addition to its meetings with the interim government, the delegation met with the former Secretary General of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, who is believed to be a front-runner for the presidency of Egypt, to discuss his vision for a future Egypt. Members of Congress also met with

various political party, women's rights and civil society leaders and visited Tahrir Square, the marshalling point for the protests that led to Mubarak's departure earlier this year.

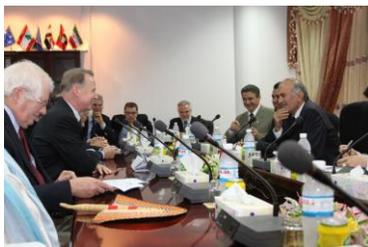
The delegation then traveled to Amman (September 29), where it was granted an audience with King Abdullah II. The discussion with the monarch focused on the future of the Middle East in light of the Arab Spring, the political reforms proposed in Jordan, and the future of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The delegation also met with the Speaker of the Jordanian Chamber of Deputies, Faisal Al-Fayez, and other members of the Jordanian parliament to discuss the legislative reforms that are underway in the Hashemite Kingdom.

On September 30, the delegation traveled to Beirut for the Commission's fourth working visit since its partnership with Lebanon was initiated in 2006. The delegation began its visit with a call on Lebanese President Michel Suleiman to discuss the current state of politics in Lebanon, Lebanese-Israeli relations, and the crisis in neighboring Syria. The delegation also met with three Members of Parliament representing Speaker Nabih Berri, to discuss the future of the partnership between the House of Representatives and the Lebanese National Assembly. Former participants in HDP training programs met with the delegation over lunch and shared their thoughts on the future of Lebanese democracy. The Congressional delegation concluded its visit by meeting with Fouad Siniora, the former Prime Minister and current head of the Future Movement parliamentary bloc, who discussed his bloc's efforts to play the role of a "responsible opposition," in addition to U.S.-Lebanese relations and the role of the United States in the Middle East.



*MPs talk to their American counterparts in the Partnership's fourth visit to Lebanon*

The delegation concluded its mission in Iraq (October 1-2), where it inaugurated HDP's 14<sup>th</sup> bilateral partnership with the Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR). The Partnership held its first official meeting with members and staff representing the Committee on Foreign Affairs, where the technical needs of the Iraqi Parliament were discussed. This was followed by meetings with the Chairman of the Human Rights Committee and the Chairman of the Higher Education Committee, who added their insights into what the Council needed to become a more effective legislature. The delegation stressed the importance of oversight of the executive branch and the ability to use the budget process to advance the legislature's goals. The delegation also met with Gen. Lloyd Austin, Commanding General of U.S. Forces-Iraq, to discuss the transition and drawdown of U.S. military forces in Iraq by the end of 2011.



*The delegation meets with members of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Partnership's inaugural meeting in Iraq*

On October 2, the delegation traveled north to Erbil to visit the constituency of two Members of the CoR to discuss constituent services. The delegation learned that these members provide a great deal of services to their constituents but receive very little backing from the government. The delegation also met with the U.S. Consul General in Erbil to discuss the consulate's plans in anticipation of the military drawdown.

For more information about the House Democracy Partnership or its work in the Middle East, contact (202) 226-1641 or visit <http://democracy.house.gov>.